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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 YEREVAN 000339

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [PREL](#) [KDEM](#) [AM](#)
SUBJECT: POLITICAL INTIMIDATION IN THE WORKPLACE - ONE
PROFESSOR'S ACCOUNT

Classified By: CDA JOSEPH PENNINGTON. REASON 1.4 (B/D)

SUMMARY

11. (C) Over the course of the recent Presidential election campaign and its aftermath, we have frequently heard accounts about workplaces being used as organizational hubs in support of the candidacy of new President Serzh Sargsian as well as for harassment and intimidation of opposition supporters. Emboff met with this week with a professor who has faced public denunciation from her school's pro-Sargsian rector, attempts to besmirch her professional reputation and intimidation by the NSS. End Summary.

TEACHING AMERICAN VALUES A BAD THING

12. (C) Emboff met April 16 with Karine Davoyan, a professor of English and Public Relations at the Russian Service State University for eight years. The university is officially supervised (and funded in part) by the Russian government, but in practice operates as a sovereign institution run by its Rector, Mushegh Asoyan. Davoyan recounted her experiences in the weeks preceding and following the recent Presidential election and March 1 crackdown on demonstrations.

13. (C) Davoyan's teaching methods included organizing debates between students, conducting public opinion polls and bringing students to U.S. Embassy film presentations. Late last year the Rector summoned her to his office and told her he didn't like her propagation of American values in his institution and that she should make her teaching more nationalistic. He said he could easily fire her simply by calling in a few students and dictating to them the text of a complaint against her.

14. (C) During the Presidential campaign she was again summoned to the Rector's office, where she was interviewed by two NSS agents, who apparently were called in by the Rector. They asked about her previous work (which included two years as a translator for the Greek Ambassador) and asked if she campaigns for any political candidates in her class. She said she never campaigns for anyone, but when students ask for her opinion, she expresses it along with her reasoning, but never seeks to impose her views. One of the NSS agents apparently agreed that she had a right to do this, and that seemed to be the end of the matter.

15. (C) When the election period began, the Rector declared that this is a pro-Russian university, so its staff should support a pro-Russian President, i.e. Serzh Sargsian. Despite the Rector's efforts, many professors and department heads gradually began to support Levon Ter-Petrosian (LTP) and Davoyan would meet them at rallies (both before and after the election), and at their request would provide them LTP

campaign DVDs.

OUT OF THE STALIN PLAYBOOK?

16. (C) On March 15, the Rector called a staff meeting and in front of everyone discussed Davoyan's behavior, labeled it unacceptable and issued her a severe public reprimand (Note: This is an official act, ostensibly connected to her job performance, not her political activity. End Note). He claimed that evaluations by students had given her very low marks for her teaching. His denunciation went on for nearly an hour, during which time none of the other staff stood up for Davoyan, although some later called to offer support and criticize the Rector's action. Another professor reportedly began to survey students to determine whether such an evaluation had indeed occurred, and was called in by the Rector's wife (who also works in the school, apparently as his enforcer) and warned she could suffer the same fate as Davoyan.

17. (C) Davoyan told Emboff that during her eight years at the school she had consistently received very high marks from students. She characterized the staff meeting as something out of the Stalin era, when the head of an institution would target one employee for his/her political views and discuss the case in front of the entire staff as a warning to them all not to step out of line. Davoyan has not returned to the school since that incident, but says students keep calling her and asking her to return. They even went to the Rector to demand her return, only to be told that "students don't like her way of teaching." Her contract with the university expires in September and she does not expect it to be renewed.

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COMMENT

18. (C) Davoyan's account seems of a piece with many we have heard about workplaces being turned by the GOAM into operations used to support Sargsian or punish opposition supporters. They have compelled participation in pro-Sargsian rallies and initiated workplace-based witch hunts for participants in post-election opposition rallies. Also quite consistent with our experience is the threat or act of employment termination - usually presented as performance-based - as reprisal for opposition political activity. It is not clear whether the Rector is serving as a political enforcer at the GOAM's behest, or is acting on his own initiative. However, given the way such institutions have been co-opted in the service of Sargsian in recent months, it seems likely that his methods would be met with approval.

PENNINGTON